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RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 2756  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001427

SIPDIS

PASS USTR FOR CUTLER, TRICK AND YOO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OPENS, BUT NOT FOR BUSINESS

Classified By: A/POL Brian McFeeters. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (SBU) Summary: The 18th National Assembly finally opened on July 10, ending the main opposition party's five week boycott. Pundits cited negative public opinion about the political paralysis, the need to prepare for the 60th anniversary of the Constitution on July 17, and the worsening economy as reasons the opposition conceded and agreed to begin work. The Assembly will soon turn its attention to an investigation into the government's handling of the beef issue, and until this investigation wraps up August 20, it is possible the committees will not form. Negotiations over the form, composition, and leadership of the standing committees are likely to be fierce. Politicians may be feeling the heat to concede after their late start, but the main opposition party, the Democratic Party, will probably put up a good fight to control a few key committees. The ruling Grand National Party (GNP) is likely to have 182 out of 299 (60 percent) seats after pro-Park lawmakers join the party, enough to secure the majority in all standing committees.  
End Summary

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Assembly Open for Business  
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12. (SBU) After the opening ceremony on July 10, the National Assembly wasted no time in addressing issues of great importance and immediately passed a resolution all agreed on, urging Japan to forego its claim of the controversial Liancourt Rocks ("Dokdo" to Koreans, and "Takeshima" to the Japanese). On July 14, Grand National Party (GNP) floor leader Hong Joon-pyo, from Seoul, announced suggestions for an inter-Korean parliamentary dialogue, postponement of discussion of a possible constitutional amendment until issues of public welfare were addressed, and called for a return to a "hard-working, economy-reviving National Assembly."

13. (SBU) The National Assembly elected GNP politician Kim Hyung-oh, a fifth term lawmaker from Busan, as Assembly Speaker. The GNP had originally planned to elect the speaker on July 4, when they convened the National Assembly without the Democratic Party (DP). Newly-elected GNP chief Park Hee-tae, however, made the decision to delay the vote until after the Democratic Party (DP) rejoined the assembly even though the GNP's majority could have placed Kim in office. Closely following his selection as speaker, Kim Hyung-oh

received a quick rebuke from the GNP leadership for calling for a constitutional amendment within the next two years. GNP chairman Park Hee-tae said the economy and the Lee Administration both needed to be stabilized before the National Assembly can start discussing a constitutional revision, which would likely take much time and energy.

¶4. (SBU) The National Assembly Special Committee for Governmental Investigations on July 14 began examining the government's decision to resume U.S. beef imports. The investigation, which will run until August 20 (unless the members can not agree on a final report, in which case its activity will be extended), is intended to clarify when and how the decision was made. This audit was part of the GNP-DP deal to start the National Assembly session. Discussions of the KORUS FTA will likely be delayed because of the pending beef investigation. Meanwhile, the DP is insisting on measures to compensate those possibly affected by the KORUS FTA.

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Party Accepts Park's People  
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¶5. (SBU) On July 10, the GNP decided to unconditionally allow Park Geun-hye's supporters elected in April into the party. A total of 25 lawmakers loyal to Park were elected as part of a minor party called the Pro-Park Alliance (13 National Assembly members) or as independents (12 members). The GNP had refused to allow these politicians to run as party candidates in April, further exacerbating a factional split in the party between Park's supporters and those loyal to President Lee Myung-bak. The return of the Park loyalists to the party is an important step in uniting these two factions and gives the GNP an even bigger majority. If five other pro-ruling party lawmakers are also accepted into the party, the GNP would have 182 seats, enough to secure the majority in all standing committees.

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Committee Squabbling  
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¶6. (SBU) The next phase of normalizing the National Assembly requires organizing and staffing the committees. First the assembly will have to reduce the number of standing committees from 17 to either 16 or 15 due to President Lee's government organizational reform earlier this year. Although the two major parties agreed to eliminate the Science, Technology, Information, and Communications Committee, the DP's request to assimilate the Environment and Labor Committee into other committees could be a source of conflict. The GNP and the DP will then have to agree on names -- there are disagreements over the proposed name changes of three committees.

¶7. (SBU) Only after the composition of the standing committees are decided will the parties start to negotiate the committee chairs and the proportion of representatives in each. In the Korean system, the ruling party does not assume the chairmanship of all committees. Since the GNP has about 182 seats and the DP has 81, pundits expect that the GNP will chair about 11 and the DP will get five to six. The strongest competition over party chairs is over the Legislation and Justice Committee through which all bills must pass. DP Floor Leader Won Hae-young emphasized that since the progressive-dominated 17th National Assembly conceded the committee to the GNP, it is the GNP's turn to reciprocate in the conservative-dominated 18th assembly.

¶8. (SBU) Tough negotiations are also likely over chairmanship of the Unification, Diplomacy, and Trade Committee, which manages the ratification of the KORUS FTA. Currently, fourth term GNP lawmaker Nam Kyung-pil is the front-runner, while GNP's Park Jin remains a possible choice. In addition, tough discussions over which committee will manage the government's Broadcast and Communications Committee are anticipated, important because they can

influence leadership of state-owned media?.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Three months are likely to pass without a single bill being passed in the National Assembly. Rather than causing outrage, this is seen as just part of the process of changing governments and reflects people's low expectations for their legislators. With the Lee Myung-bak government reeling from the ongoing beef fiasco, striking out at Japan over Liancourt Rocks and staggering to deal with the murder of a tourist at Mt. Kumgang, a stalled National Assembly is the last thing Lee needs. The government, shell-shocked from its tumultuous first months, will likely take some time before it can take legislative action on alliance issues or the KORUS FTA.  
VERSHBOW